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INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT
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Agenda item 10

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

Draft report

Rapporteur: Mr. Mahbub KABIR (Bangladesh)

Chapter ___.

ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THOSE OF THE CENTRE FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT AND THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT

(Agenda item 6)

1. In his introduction, the Officer-in-Charge of the Centre for Science and Technology for Development stated that the item dealt with the Committee's original mandate given by the General Assembly to assist it in the task of monitoring the activities and programmes of the United Nations system in science and technology for development. The ultimate goal of this task, he said, was to improve the quality of the response of the system as a whole to the needs of Member States in science and technology for development. As the Committee was aware through more than a decade of its work on that issue, the task of inter-agency coordination was complicated by the pervasiveness of science and technology activities throughout the system and the complex set of interrelations which existed among the intergovernmental organs involved, both within the United Nations and the specialized agencies. However, he believed that the report of the Director-General on new developments and trends in the programmes and activities of the United Nations system in science and technology (A/CN.11/1991/5) reflected a recent evolution in the system as a

whole towards an improved recognition of the substantive goals of the Vienna Programme of Action.

2. The Officer-in-Charge also introduced the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Centre (A/CN.11/1991/9).

3. The Chairman of the ACC Task Force on Science and Technology for Development expressed his view that the substantive bodies of the ACC might not always have lived up to their expectations. The agencies had often attended coordinating meetings without the wish to be coordinated. However, the Task Force had tried to identify common interests and had voluntarily developed innovative coordination through inter-agency missions. There was a need for additional efforts to develop a stable basis for coordination so as to make the Task Force more effective and better integrated in its United Nations system activities.

4. At its recent session, the Task Force had considered the topic of biotechnology and had prepared a bibliography on the subject. In the view of the Chairman, biotechnology was not an exclusive activity of any one specialized agency. Nevertheless, the combined activities in that area of most of the agencies could assume proper significance.

5. The Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Science and Technology for Development introduced and summarized the report of his Committee (A/CN.11/1991/6). He also informed the Intergovernmental Committee that the Advisory Committee had chosen as the theme of its next session the role of science and technology in small developing countries, and that it welcomed suggestions from members of the Intergovernmental Committee for specific policy issues which might be addressed by that theme.

6. Many of the delegations expressed their appreciation for the report of the Director-General. The representative of one developing country noted that his country was impressed with the information but would have liked to see specific recommendations on the two key issues of coordination and harmonization. He was interested to note a thematic commonality in the United Nations system in fields such as biotechnology, micro-electronics and new materials, and in endogenous capacity-building. He expressed his desire for more comprehensive and detailed listing of those developments.

7. Several representatives reiterated their desire to see the Centre assume a stronger role in coordination, as foreseen in General Assembly resolution 34/218. The representative of one developing country pointed out that the Centre was the institutional instrument designed to affirm the central role of the United Nations in the promotion of science and technology for development.

8. Appreciation was also expressed for the ACC Task Force on Science and Technology for Development. One representative from a developed country stated that he would like to see the role of the Task Force further strengthened.

9. Many representatives expressed their strong support for the endogenous capacity-building pilot projects, and some expressed their desire to have similar projects implemented in their countries, in addition to those already under way.

10. The representative of a developed country stated that his delegation was pleased to see that activities of the Centre were focused on the central theme of the Vienna Programme of Action - namely, endogenous capacity-building of developing countries. He proposed that, in order to improve the pilot projects, the respective countries should engage external consultants sufficiently familiar with their socio-economic situations and with the area of science and technology and make better use of mobilizing technical expertise available in the United Nations system.

11. A representative of a developed country emphasized the importance of endogenous capacity-building and pointed out that the theme on transfer and management of environmentally sound technologies was closely related to that. He therefore welcomed the organization by the Centre of a series of conferences on policy issues and options related to an assessment of clean-coal technology. He also noted that endogenous capacity-building was an important prerequisite for access to information and data on environmentally sound technologies, and he suggested that the possibilities of regional cooperation in that field be strongly considered.

12. A representative of a developing country said that the endogenous capacity-building project being carried out in his country, in cooperation with the Centre, was of great significance to the country.

13. Another representative of a developing country expressed his appreciation for the activities of the Centre and their increasingly practical ability to respond effectively to the increased needs of developing countries in science and technology. He singled out particularly the seminar on desertification, held in China in 1990, at which emphasis was placed on endogenous capacity-building to combat desertification and develop arid and semi-arid areas.

14. The representative of a developing country pointed out that the report of the Director-General contained suggestions regarding the promotion of entrepreneurship in developing countries in small and medium-sized industries, enterprises to develop environmentally sound technologies and assistance to facilitate establishment of consultancy businesses for technological management. He expressed his desire to receive additional information on what was envisaged and what practical measures were feasible to realize those objectives. The representative of a developed country also stressed need to examine closely the problem of creating market mechanisms for technological innovations. In particular he suggested that attention be given to the legislative measures which could affect innovation.

15. Several representatives expressed their continued support for the Advanced Technology Assessment System and emphasized the need to approach it

from both a methodological and a capacity-building point of view. The representative of a developed country suggested that increasing attention be given to developing the endogenous capacity of technology assessment in developing countries and not just to satisfying curiosity. Several representatives from both developed and developing countries supported the idea of a 1992 meeting on the role of technological monitoring, assessment and forecasting. One representative of a developing country proposed that the suggestion need to be examined in depth.

16. A representative of a developed country stressed the importance of being able to choose, possess, apply and adapt environmentally sound technologies, including adaptation to the social, economic, technological and environmental conditions of developing countries. A necessary prerequisite was investments in the development of human resources through education and enhanced research capabilities.

17. Many of the delegations expressed their appreciation for the report of the Advisory Committee and suggested that the recommendations in the report could provide a useful input for the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development.

18. The representative of a developed country noted that the report provided useful guidance and proposals on the future orientation of science and technology for development. Another representative of a developed country supported the Advisory Committee proposal for setting up international technical parks, where there could be the concrete embodiment of cooperation.

19. Several representatives expressed their appreciation for the report on the methodologies and asked the Committee to consider ways in which its recommendations might be implemented.

20. The representative of a developing country proposed that the next theme of the Intergovernmental Committee should take advantage of newly developed mathematical modelling, especially non-linear modelling, in order to examine and compare the results of similar and different approaches to applying science and technology to development. The comparison would be applicable to sectors and sub-sectors both within a single country and between different countries.

21. The representative of the United Nations University provided information on the University research programmes which included not only basic scientific research but also the application of science and technology in support of the development process. He pointed out that, in the context of the University's Second Medium-Term Perspective (1990-1995), the University's research agenda would focus on advances in science and technology for development. Major aspects of the related work were central to the work of the Institute for New Technologies (INTECH) in Maastricht, the Netherlands; the International Institute for Software Technology (IIST) in Macau; the Programme of Biotechnology in Latin America and the Caribbean (BIOLAC) in Caracas; and the programmes coordinated by the University Centre in Tokyo. He noted that the

University had developed close collaborative ties with the Centre in several areas. One of those was a joint project to set up a machine-readable register of research in the United Nations system - initially in the area of science and technology and subsequently in other areas.

22. The representative of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) highlighted some of the ILO's experiences in monitoring and forecasting the social impact of newly emerging technologies, especially on employment, productivity and the working environment. The areas covered by the organization's technology assessment exercise included biotechnology; micro-electronics-related technologies and robotization.

23. The representative of the Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) summarized the organization's activities in relation to endogenous capacity-building in science and technology for development, which had somehow not been reflected in the report of the Director-General.

24. The reprsentative of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs stated that the World Economic Survey, prepared by the Department, provided an overall account of economic trends, including those that affected sustainable development. The Department attached great importance to the role of entrepreneurship and had thus assisted in the promotion of the private sector in general and more specifically in the development of entrepreneurship in, for instance, small and medium-sized enterprises.

25. The representative of the Third World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) called attention to the Academy's achievements in providing due recognition to scientific excellence in the third world as well as research grants to fellowships to promising young scientists from the South. He also referred to the proposal being made by the Academy's Chairman to develop a network of research and training centres of excellence in science and technology and in environmental sciences, which was being welcomed by many countries. In his view, the need for coordination being referred to in the Director-General's report between the United Nations system and the Third World Academy of Sciences and its network of scientific institutions should be extended to new non-governmental organizations created at the regional level.

26. The representative of the European Commission of Social Research in Latin America underlined the importance of social sciences. His organization's preoccupation was the potential repercussion of a restructuring of the relationship beween Europe and Latin America. The Commission also proposed a special working group, with possible support of the United Nations system, to focus on the sociology of science and technology.